

**Security Council**

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**Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations
Disengagement Observer Force for the period from
23 February to 23 May 2018****I. Introduction**

1. The present report gives an account of the activities of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) during the period from 23 February to 23 May 2018, pursuant to the mandate contained in Security Council resolution 350 (1974) and extended in subsequent resolutions, most recently resolution 2394 (2017).

II. Situation in the area of operations and activities of the Force

2. During the reporting period, the ceasefire between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic was maintained, albeit in a volatile environment attributable to the ongoing conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, and notwithstanding a number of violations of the Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian Forces (Disengagement of Forces Agreement) of 1974, which are described below. The Syrian armed Forces and non-State armed opposition groups engaged in exchanges of heavy weapons fire in the areas of separation and limitation on the Bravo side. Various armed groups, including the listed terrorist groups Jabhat Fath al-Sham (formerly the Nusra Front) and the Khalid Ibn al-Walid Army, which pledged allegiance to Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), continued to exchange fire in the UNDOF area of operations. As underscored again by the Security Council in its resolution 2394 (2017), there should be no military activity of any kind in the area of separation.

3. In employing its best efforts to maintain the ceasefire and see that it is scrupulously observed, as prescribed in the Disengagement of Forces Agreement, UNDOF reports all breaches of the ceasefire line that it observes. All incidents of firing into the area of separation and across the ceasefire line, as well as the crossing of the ceasefire line by individuals, are violations of the Agreement. In its regular interaction with both sides, the leadership of UNDOF continued to call upon both parties to exercise restraint and prevent any miscalculations that might lead to an escalation of the situation. That was particularly the case when it responded to incidents of spillover and retaliatory fire.

4. Tensions escalated on 10 May in the areas of separation and limitation and across the ceasefire line. In the early hours of 10 May, the Israel Defense Forces informed UNDOF that rockets had been fired from the Syrian Arab Republic onto the Alpha side. Subsequently, the Israel Defense Forces fired across the ceasefire line in



what they considered to be retaliation. On that day, UNDOF observed heavy explosive rounds from the Alpha side (Israeli-occupied Golan) fired across the ceasefire line, impacting in the area of separation. Heavy firing was observed from the Alpha side towards locations in the vicinity of the tri-village area of Jubbata al-Khashab, Ufaniyah and Turunjah: UNDOF personnel at United Nations observation post 73 observed an Israel Defense Forces main battle tank firing 12 rounds across the ceasefire line. The rounds impacted in the vicinity of United Nations observation post 71. UNDOF later observed two missiles impacting inside observation post 71. UNDOF personnel at observation post 73 also observed in excess of 10 missiles impacting in the tri-village area of Jubbata al-Khashab, Ufaniyah and Turunjah in the area of separation. UNDOF personnel saw the Israel Defense Forces fire a surface-to-air missile to intercept a missile that had been launched from the Bravo side. While UNDOF personnel observed and heard a considerable number of heavy explosions occurring in the area of separation, they were not in a position to verify all incidents or ascertain the points of origin and exact points of impact, owing to the mission's limited visibility of the area of separation and the ceasefire line. As a result of the intensity and frequency of explosions, United Nations personnel in UNDOF positions on the Bravo and Alpha sides took shelter in bunkers for a period of approximately five hours. Throughout the events, UNDOF maintained liaison with the Israel Defense Forces and Syrian authorities to ensure restraint and that the parties respected the Disengagement of Forces Agreement.

5. On 23 April, UNDOF personnel observed an artillery round impact west of the ceasefire line in the vicinity of Qahtaniyah. The point of impact was in proximity to United Nations observation post 51. When the artillery round was fired, an Israel Defense Forces patrol was present in the area of impact. UNDOF was not in a position to determine the point of origin of the artillery round. Israel Defense Forces soldiers fired single rifle shots into Qahtaniyah, in the area of separation. Subsequently, the Israel Defense Forces informed UNDOF that they had targeted a Syrian armed forces artillery position on the Bravo side, from which the fire had originated. UNDOF informed the Israel Defense Forces that it was ready to conduct an investigation into the spillover artillery fire incident. A response from the Israel Defense Forces is pending.

6. On a number of occasions, UNDOF personnel witnessed Israel Defense Forces soldiers firing gunshots across the ceasefire line. On 18 February, United Nations personnel at observation post 53 observed an Israel Defense Forces patrol firing single shots towards the area of separation. On 3 March, personnel at observation post 73 observed six Israel Defense Forces soldiers firing single shots into the area of separation. On 7 March, personnel at observation post 53 saw four Israel Defense Forces soldiers firing single rifle shots into the area of separation.

7. UNDOF continued to observe daily the crossing of the ceasefire line by unidentified individuals from the Bravo side to the Alpha side. On 17 April, during UNDOF mine-clearance operations on a route that leads to United Nations temporary observation posts on Mount Hermon in the area of separation, UNDOF observed boxes, suspected to be ammunition boxes, scattered on the ground in the vicinity of one of the temporary observation posts, about 2 km south-east of the United Nations position Hermon South.

8. Throughout the reporting period, UNDOF observed the continuous presence of unidentified individuals at the vacated United Nations observation post 71. The construction work on observation post 71 that had begun in December 2017 (see S/2018/244) had stopped by early May. However, following the events of 10 May, UNDOF observed unidentified individuals rebuilding and repairing observation post 71.

9. The level of transborder movements through Mount Hermon by unidentified individuals crossing between Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic increased during the reporting period. On 23 March, 8 April and 6, 15 and 16 May, UNDOF personnel at United Nations Hermon Base position observed unidentified individuals, some of them armed, with mules moving between the Bravo side and Lebanon.

10. UNDOF continued to observe, on a daily basis, the crossing of the ceasefire line by unidentified individuals from the Bravo to the Alpha side. In the vicinity of United Nations observation post 54, in the southern part of the area of separation, groups of individuals from the Bravo side, ranging from 20 to 58 per day, were observed crossing the ceasefire line on foot and entering a building on the Alpha side. The Israel Defense Forces had previously informed UNDOF that a hospital located adjacent to their position was providing humanitarian assistance to local civilians. These groups of individuals were observed leaving the building, crossing the ceasefire line and moving back towards Mu'allaqah on the Bravo side.

11. In the context of the ongoing Syrian conflict, the northern part of the areas of separation and limitation generally saw low levels of fighting, with the noted escalation and intensity of kinetic activity occurring on 10 May. On 24 February, high-explosive fire was observed impacting in the vicinity of Jubbata al-Khashab in the area of separation. On 14 March, UNDOF personnel at observation post 73 observed 10 tracer rounds of ammunition impacting approximately 2 km south-east of their post. On 6 May, UNDOF observed 11 high-explosive rounds impacting in a location north-west of Jubbata al-Khashab in the area of separation.

12. Fighting between the Syrian armed forces, supported by pro-Government armed elements, and armed groups in the central parts of the areas of separation and limitation continued at low to medium levels of intensity. Throughout the reporting period, exchanges of fire occurred between the Syrian armed forces, supported by pro-Government armed elements in Khan Arnabah, Jaba and Ba'th, on one side, and other non-State armed groups in Samdaniyah al-Gharbiyah, Umm Batinah and New Hamidiyeh, on the other. On 23 February, UNDOF observed machine gun fire emanating from the vicinity of Umm Batinah. The point of impact of the machine gun fire could not be determined. On the same day, UNDOF observed high-explosive fire from an artillery piece originating from the vicinity of United Nations outpost 60A. On 23 February, UNDOF personnel observed a main battle tank that was stationary in the vicinity of Qunaytirah, in the area of separation, and subsequently heard explosions, which were followed by a movement of the tank in a southerly direction. On 25 March, UNDOF observed five heavy explosions impacting in the vicinity of New Hamidiyeh. UNDOF was not in a position to determine the point of origin of the explosions. On 6 May, UNDOF observed and heard in excess of 10 high-explosive rounds in the central part of the area of separation.

13. In the southern part of the areas of separation and limitation on the Bravo side, which remain for the most part under the control of non-State armed groups, including those listed by the Security Council as terrorist groups, fighting continued between armed groups, especially the Khalid Ibn al-Waleed Army, on one side, and the Free Syrian Army and Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, on the other. According to open sources, intermittent fighting continued around the area of Tasil in the area of limitation. United Nations personnel at observation post 54 and position 80 heard heavy explosions and bursts of heavy machine gun fire from the general direction of Tasil.

14. In the early hours of 19 April, United Nations personnel at observation post 54, located on the Alpha side east of the technical fence, observed seven unidentified individuals armed with AK-47 rifles approximately 450 metres south-east of the post. The individuals patrolled the area and stopped approximately 350 metres from the post, remaining in the area. After a period of time, the unidentified armed men

withdrew towards the southern part of the area of separation. The United Nations personnel at the post maintained a heightened level of safety and security alertness and monitored the situation.

15. Throughout the reporting period, the Syrian armed forces, supported by pro-Government armed elements, maintained positions in the area of separation, in particular in the vicinity of Ba'th and Khan Arnabah, as well as along the main road connecting Qunaytirah to Damascus.

16. The military violations on the Alpha side included approximately 200 reports of the presence of 155-mm artillery within 10 km of the ceasefire line, as well as Iron Dome systems and missile carriers within the 25 km zone of the area of limitation, which are considered unauthorized military equipment in the area of limitation pursuant to the terms of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement.

17. UNDOF protested all violations of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement that it observed to both parties, including the crossing of the ceasefire line by civilians from the Bravo side and the presence of unauthorized equipment and armed individuals in the area of separation, as well as firing into the area of separation and across the ceasefire line.

18. During the reporting period, UNDOF observed several locations where more than 485 tents and other structures appeared to have been set up for internally displaced persons in the area of separation and its vicinity. The number of people in the camps could not be ascertained and appeared to fluctuate. Owing to the closure of the established crossing point at Qunaytirah between the Alpha and Bravo sides since late August 2014, UNDOF remains unable to facilitate, in cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross, humanitarian crossings, including for students, between the two sides.

19. Since its temporary relocation from a number of positions in September 2014, and pending its full return to the area of separation, UNDOF has continued to maintain visibility, albeit limited, of the area of separation and the ceasefire line from its positions on Mount Hermon, Camp Faouar, position 80, in the southern part of the area of separation, and position 22, on the Alpha side. UNDOF operations continued to be supported by United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) military observers in Observer Group Golan, who are under the operational control of UNDOF and have maintained five fixed and four temporary observation posts along the ceasefire line, as well as four temporary observation posts on Mount Hermon. The focus of the activities of Observer Group Golan is on continuous static observation and situational awareness. The occupation by Observer Group Golan of observation posts on Mount Hermon was suspended on 3 December 2017 with the onset of winter and resumed on 30 April 2018.

20. Through Observer Group Golan, UNDOF continued to carry out fortnightly inspections of equipment and force levels in the area of limitation on the Alpha side. Liaison officers from the Alpha side accompanied the inspection teams. Inspections in the area of limitation on the Bravo side remained suspended because of the security situation.

21. Engagement between UNDOF and the Israel Defense Forces continued to endeavour to address restrictions of movement and access to United Nations positions in the area of separation and to reduce delays and challenges experienced by United Nations personnel in crossing through the technical fence to observation posts and positions. The Head of Mission and Force Commander of UNDOF continued to remind the parties of their obligation to scrupulously abide by the terms of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement, to ensure the safety and security of United

Nations personnel on the ground and to extend all cooperation to UNDOF in the fulfilment of the tasks under its mandate.

22. UNDOF, in consultation with both parties, continued to review the situation in the area of separation in order to assess whether the conditions on the ground permitted the return to vacated positions in the area of separation. In that regard, UNDOF conducted assessment visits and continuously monitored the security situation prevailing in the area of separation, mainly in the vicinity of United Nations observation posts 52, 56, 71 and 72, and positions 10, 16 and 32.

23. During the reporting period, UNDOF made progress towards the limited return to Bravo side operations, in line with the phased UNDOF plan (see S/2018/244). In phase 2 of the plan, UNDOF continues to develop the infrastructure and steadily improve the living conditions at Camp Faouar. The security and defence of the Camp have been continuously rehearsed, and all deployed elements have been integrated into a cohesive and effective component, with clear command and control mechanisms.

24. Since the resumption of patrolling on the Bravo side in February 2018, the UNDOF mechanized infantry company has conducted in excess of 30 protected patrols on the four designated routes in the northern and central parts of the areas of separation and limitation.

25. Phase 2 of the UNDOF plan also includes the refurbishment of facilities and security infrastructure of select observation posts in the area of separation, with a view to reoccupying observation posts 56, 71 and 72 in phase 3 of the incremental return to the Bravo side operations, conditions permitting. The UNDOF Joint Operations Centre completed its relocation to Camp Faouar, from which UNDOF operational activities are coordinated. The return of the UNDOF temporary headquarters from Ya'fur, Damascus, to Camp Faouar progressed significantly, with the office of the Force Commander now relocated to Camp Faouar. Observer Group Golan will not be deployed at observation posts on a permanent basis until such time as the security conditions permit and adequate accommodation and appropriate force protection measures are in place.

26. In accordance with the provisions of resolution 2394 (2017), and the UNDOF operational concept, UNDOF continued its efforts to deploy appropriate technology to ensure the safety and security of UNDOF personnel and equipment. A surveillance trailer remains deployed on the Alpha side at Camp Ziouani and position 22, while another is maintained at Camp Faouar. In addition, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations continued to engage with the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and the Government of Israel regarding the "sense and warn" system, the technical specifications of which were shared with the parties in July 2017. The Syrian authorities have indicated that they will not agree to the deployment of the sense and warn system. The Israel Defense Forces have informally expressed that they have no objection to the deployment.

27. UNDOF continued to resupply its positions on Mount Hermon and Camp Faouar from Damascus. UNDOF convoys between Damascus and the United Nations positions were conducted almost daily, using main supply route 7 and the Salam highway with an UNDOF security escort, accompanied by a liaison officer from the office of the Senior Syrian Arab Delegate. UNDOF continuously monitors the situation and takes the necessary precautionary measures in planning and conducting its convoys along main supply route 7 and the Salam highway. UNDOF continued to conduct and update its contingency planning for the reinforcement and evacuation of United Nations positions and observation posts on both the Alpha and Bravo sides, as well as in Damascus. UNDOF, through its Force Reserve Company, conducted regular rehearsals, exercises and training for identified contingencies. The implementation of

risk mitigation measures, including force protection measures recommended in the military capability study of UNDOF, continued to be developed at observation posts, positions and operational bases at Camp Ziouani and Camp Faouar.

28. UNDOF continued to follow closely the developments related to the de-escalation zone in the south-western part of the Syrian Arab Republic, which had been established in accordance with an agreement reached on 9 July 2017 between Jordan, the Russian Federation and the United States of America. Given the partial overlap between the de-escalation zone and the UNDOF area of operations, UNDOF maintained contact with relevant interlocutors to seek clarity with regard to arrangements envisaged under the agreement and their potential implications for UNDOF. The continuation of these contacts is particularly important in facilitating the implementation of the UNDOF mandate and in ensuring the freedom of movement of the Force as well as the safety and security of United Nations personnel.

29. As at 16 May 2018, UNDOF comprised 990 troops, including 36 women. Troops are currently deployed from Bhutan (2), Czechia (2), Fiji (300), Finland (2), Ghana (12), India (199), Ireland (138), Nepal (333) and the Netherlands (2). In addition, 70 military observers from UNTSO/Observer Group Golan, including 8 women, assisted UNDOF in carrying out its tasks.

III. Implementation of Security Council resolution 338 (1973)

30. In its resolution 2394 (2017), the Security Council called upon the parties concerned to immediately implement its resolution 338 (1973). It decided to renew the mandate of UNDOF for a further period of six months, until 30 June 2018, and requested the Secretary-General to report every 90 days on developments in the situation and the measures taken to implement resolution 338 (1973). The search for a peaceful settlement of the conflict in the Middle East, in particular the efforts made at various levels to implement resolution 338 (1973), is addressed in my report on the situation in the Middle East (A/72/333), submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 71/24 on the Syrian Golan and 71/25 on Jerusalem.

31. Since the discontinuation of indirect peace talks in December 2008, there have been no negotiations between the parties. The Syrian conflict further reduces the prospects for their resumption and for progress towards peace between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic. I look forward to a peaceful resolution of the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic and the resumption of efforts towards a comprehensive, just and durable peace settlement, as called for by the Security Council in its resolution 338 (1973) and other relevant resolutions.

IV. Financial aspects

32. The General Assembly, by its resolution 71/306 of 30 June 2017, appropriated the amount of \$57.7 million for the maintenance of the Force for the period from 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2018.

33. As at 25 May 2018, unpaid assessed contributions to the Special Account for UNDOF amounted to \$19.7 million. The total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations as at that date amounted to \$2,129.6 million.

34. Reimbursement of troop costs has been made for the period up to 31 January 2018, while reimbursement of the costs of contingent-owned equipment has been made for the period up to 31 December 2017, in accordance with the quarterly payment schedule.

V. Observations

35. I am deeply concerned by the continued military activity in the UNDOF area of operations. I reiterate my grave concern about the escalation of tensions between the parties to the Disengagement of Forces Agreement, as shown by the events on 23 April and 10 May, in the area of separation and limitation on the Bravo side, and across the ceasefire line. Those developments jeopardize the Disengagement of Forces Agreement. I urge the parties to exercise maximum restraint at all times. I encourage members of the Security Council to support efforts to sensitize both parties and regional stakeholders to the risks of escalation and the need to preserve the long-standing ceasefire between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic.

36. It remains critical that the parties maintain their liaison with UNDOF in the first instance, to prevent any escalation of the situation across the ceasefire line. For its part, the United Nations will maintain efforts to ensure that the long-standing ceasefire between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic continues to hold.

37. I remain gravely concerned by the security situation prevailing in the Syrian Arab Republic, its impact on the Syrian population and its implications for the stability of the wider region. The continued fighting on the Bravo side between the Syrian armed forces and armed groups, and between various armed groups, including listed terrorist groups, such as Jabhat Fath al-Sham, and ISIL affiliates, such as the Khalid Ibn al-Walid Army, in the UNDOF area of operations jeopardize the long-term ceasefire between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic and continue to significantly affect UNDOF mandate implementation and the UNDOF area of operations.

38. There should be no military forces in the area of separation other than those of UNDOF. I urge all parties to the Syrian conflict to cease military actions throughout the country, including in the UNDOF area of operations, and to remove all military equipment and armed personnel from the area of separation.

39. I reiterate my call to both parties to the Disengagement of Forces Agreement regarding the requirement to maintain stability in the area. All military activities in the area of separation conducted by any actor pose a risk to the ceasefire and to the local civilian population, in addition to the United Nations personnel on the ground. I call upon all parties to take the measures necessary to protect civilians and United Nations personnel, in line with their obligations under international law, in particular international humanitarian law.

40. The firing across the ceasefire line by the Israel Defense Forces has the potential to escalate tensions between the two sides. The continued presence of unauthorized weapons and equipment in the area of limitation on the Alpha side is also of concern.

41. As UNDOF continues to consolidate its presence at Camp Faouar and maintains its efforts to intensify its operations in the area of separation, it remains critical that the safety and security of United Nations personnel be assured. The circumstances under which the troops and military observers are operating remain complex and challenging, and require continued vigilance and risk mitigation measures. I renew my call on the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to fulfil its primary responsibility for the safety and security of United Nations personnel on the Bravo side. I also renew my call on countries with influence to strongly and urgently convey to the armed groups in the UNDOF area of operations that it is imperative to cease any action in violation of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement, including actions that jeopardize the safety and security of United Nations personnel, and to enable UNDOF to carry out its mandate safely and securely.

42. Both Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic have stated their continued commitment to the Disengagement of Forces Agreement and support for the presence

of UNDOF in calling for a return to vacated positions in the area of separation. The full return of UNDOF to the area of separation remains a priority for the Force, conditions permitting. I count on the continued cooperation of both parties to facilitate the mission in advancing its planning for the incremental return to operations and positions in the area of separation and to ensure that the mission can implement its mandate. As a matter of priority, the deployment of technology and equipment necessary to enhance the UNDOF observation of the area of separation and the ceasefire line, while also augmenting UNDOF force protection, remains critical. In that regard, the support and cooperation of both Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic continue to be essential.

43. It is equally important that the Security Council continue to bring to bear its influence on the parties concerned to ensure that UNDOF is accorded the ability to operate in a safe and secure manner and is allowed to operate freely in accordance with the Disengagement of Forces Agreement. As long as the area of separation remains militarized and the presence of armed groups and/or Syrian armed forces continues, UNDOF will only fulfil its mandate in a limited manner. It is essential that this issue be addressed by the parties to the Disengagement of Forces Agreement and in the wider framework of the Syrian political process. Furthermore, the reopening of the regular Qunaytirah crossing point would benefit the ability of UNDOF to implement its mandate. It is also necessary for UNDOF to continue to have at its disposal all means and resources necessary for it to return fully to the area of separation, conditions permitting.

44. The confidence and commitment of troop-contributing countries in UNDOF remains a key factor in the mission's ability to carry out its mandate. I continue to count on the support of troop-contributing countries as UNDOF proceeds with the implementation of its agreed plan for increased operations in the area of separation. I am grateful to the Governments of Bhutan, Czechia, Fiji, Finland, Ghana, India, Ireland, Nepal and the Netherlands for their contributions, their commitment and their resolve. I am also thankful to the Member States contributing military observers to UNTSO.

45. I consider the continued presence of UNDOF in the area to be essential, and all the more so under the prevailing circumstances. I therefore recommend that the Security Council extend the mandate of the Force for a further period of six months, until 31 December 2018. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic has given its assent to the proposed extension. The Government of Israel has also expressed its agreement.

46. In conclusion, I wish to express my appreciation to the Head of Mission and Force Commander, Major General Francis Vib-Sanziri, and the military and civilian personnel serving under his leadership in UNDOF, who continue to perform the important tasks assigned to them by the Security Council with efficiency and commitment under extremely challenging circumstances.

Map

